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DE RUEHNR #2349/01 3161302  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH(CCY ADXD7646E MSI3477 540A)  
R 121302Z NOV 09 ZDS  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1538

UNCLAS NAIROBI 002349

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED SIGNATURE)

PASS TO RICHARD RUGGIERO, US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: African Elephant Conservation Fund - Monitoring of  
Elephants in the Greater Ewaso Ecosystem and the North Kenyan Coast

REF: Two proposals submitted to the USFWS African Elephant  
Conservation Fund by:

1. "Monitoring of African Elephants along the North Kenyan Coast" by  
Save the Elephants
2. Greater Ewaso Elephant Conservation by the Mpala Research Center

1. Summary. Kenya has been at the forefront of elephant conservation in Africa under the leadership of the Kenya Wildlife Service supported by NGOs of the scientific community. NGOs play significant roles in elephant monitoring and surveillance, data acquisition and analysis, training, advocating for conservation and leveraging resources to match those of the Government of Kenya. The US Mission to Kenya has reviewed proposals from two such organizations - Save the Elephants and the Mpala Research Center - and unhesitatingly endorses them. End Summary.

2. Kenya has long been associated with elephant conservation in Africa, but the country's positions concerning elephant hunting and the ivory trade have been contentious. Kenya normally takes 'contrarian' views on these issues compared to those held by many of the other states within the geographic range of the African elephant (the 'range states'). There are arguments concerning the benefits of Kenya's positions, but there is no doubt about Kenya's commitment to elephant protection and conservation.

3. Kenya's elephants are recovering slowly from the massive poaching of the 1970s and '80s. But populations are becoming more restricted by massive increases in human population and destruction of habitat. Since 1990, after the formation of a well-managed Kenya Wildlife Service and the end of the legal ivory trade (through elevation of African elephants to CITES Appendix I status), the national population has gradually increased to roughly 30,000. Some areas of the elephant's former range, particularly in the northern parts of Kenya, are being re-occupied as security improves.

4. The largest home ranges for the Kenya's elephants are the Tsavo and Laikipia-Samburu ecosystems and contiguous areas to the north. Significant portions of these ecosystems fall within the Ewaso landscape - one of the geographic areas in the proposal of the Mpala Research Center and partners. The Greater Ewaso Landscape, and Laikipia in particular, is gaining prominence as a wildlife destination with tourism contributing substantially to the local economy. Here, elephant population estimates in 2002 were above 5,000 individuals; this has now grown to over 7,000.

5. Populations of forest-dwelling elephants occur mainly in the Aberdare Mountains and Mt. Kenya, with small, isolated groups in coastal forests and western Kenya. The dense forests of the KIBODO area, mainly in the Boni and Dodori National Reserves in Kenya's north coast, are home to a critically endangered and largely unstudied population of approximately 300 individuals. This population is the subject of the proposal by Save the Elephants and its partners.

6. The most urgent and immediate problems for elephants in these

ecosystems are the increasing frequency and severity of drought and the escalation of illegal killing. Since April 2009, there has been an increase in natural elephant mortality associated with the severe drought in Northern Kenya. The majority of deaths have been juvenile or sub-adults with a few cases of very old animals also succumbing. Death has been attributed to lack of forage resulting in poor nutrition and starvation, particularly among smaller elephants which compete with livestock for browse. Illegal killing is a result of conflict between humans/livestock and elephants over crop raiding and competition for limited water resources. Of course, ivory poaching plays a role.

¶7. The major threat to the Coastal elephant populations is likely to be the large numbers of firearms in the hands of local communities, mainly related to the breakdown of law and order in Somalia since the early 1990s. Aerial counts of the elephants in the 1970s estimated between 15,000 and 30,000 individuals. Their population has since plummeted to estimated 50-300 individuals.

¶8. There is a critical need to better understand the populations' response to threats. Monitoring is key to assessing the impact of conservation efforts and to keep track of populations under management. Therefore, the USG Mission in Kenya endorses the two proposals by the Mpala Research Center and Save the Elephants and their host of partners to bring US Fish and Wildlife Service resources to bear in enhancing elephant monitoring efforts in the Ewaso and North Coast landscapes.

¶9. The projects funded under these proposals should give numerous benefits. Knowledge of home ranges and favored areas will assist better-targeted surveillance and security to control poaching. The accuracy in counts of coastal populations will improve as information at present is highly variable. Interpretations of data will enable better understanding of the impacts of climate change on elephant distribution and on the quality of habitat. The data will

be used by wildlife managers to improve conservation strategies for Kenya's elephants as they grapple to mitigate the factors driving illegal killing. Finally, monitoring information will inform public awareness campaigns, increase national interest and raise the profile of elephant conservation among local communities living with elephants.

¶10. The USG in Kenya contributes to the elephant conservation and management efforts of communities, local and international organizations including the KIBODO Trust, Northern Rangelands Trust, Laikipia Wildlife Forum and nearly two dozen community wildlife conservancies. At the national level, the USG continues to work collaboratively with KWS to advance policies, tools, attitudes, and ideas for conserving wildlife in targeted landscapes. These activities provide progressive partnerships with which USFWS may engage to achieve the goals of the monitoring proposals.

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